

ACROSS THE NEW YORK FOOTLIGHTS

By GEORGE JEAN NATHAN.

In every American city enjoying a population of sufficient size to warrant more than one letter carrier, one bakery-wagon boy and two professional drunks, there is to be found a collection of individuals who meet weekly in some one's front parlor and simultaneously have a plate of ice cream and cake and an ambition to improve the drama. The majority of these congresses refer to themselves by the name of "Stage Societies." Things have come to the point, indeed, where one of these stage societies is as much a part of the life of an American village as a framed sepia lithograph of the Coliseum, a photograph record of Fost's "Good-bye," and "The Soul Machine" are to a New York City of \$500,000 a year.

Not to fall behind such metropolises as Ogrun's Falls and Applegate Corners, New York has also come to the front with a stage society. And this particular stage society has, in turn, now come to the front with a production of the play "The Soul Machine" by a Mr. Daniel Garretson called "The Soul Machine." In just what manner New York Stage Society Lodge MMDXXI believes to uplift or otherwise improve the native platform with such a play as "The Soul Machine" is some what uneasy of appreciation. That is, of course, granting this to be the purpose of the organization in point. It may be that the New York Stage Society has no such notion in its constitution. It may, in faith, be merely a joy club or a dance-venue, a gathering of congenial souls out for a high old time who chanced accidentally to call themselves a stage society for want of a catchier name. But, not being privy to other purposes, I am going to take the organization literally and, so taking it, to approach its public manifestations with a professional theatrical eye.

"The Soul Machine," though credited upon the play bill to the male member above, is at least according to Broadway bookmakers who have laid odds of one hundred to one on the dark horse—a product of the pen of Augustus Thomas. Whether or not Mr. Thomas is actually the chief of the composition, one cannot with further definiteness say. Yet so many of the theses of the play are the typical Thomaesque of the play, so seemingly obvious the giveaways, that the prevalent belief as to the fathering of the piece may be indorsed with some conviction. Basically, the play is a satire on the detective fiction, begun some fifteen years ago in the Strand Magazine by a couple of cleverly minded Englishmen and since pursued, five or six years back, by Balmer and McHarg in Hampton's, and, currently, in divers journals by Arthur B. Reeve. The theses of these fictions, the most recent of which, the classroom addresses of such professors of the occult as Herr Munsterberg, of Harvard, is familiar to my flock. Some one, so goes the recipe, is suspected of something. The regular minions of the law are baffled. Then a man of science, Rupert attaches to the nose of the suspect a malodorous meter, which is to say a baking-powder can filled with a mixture of carbolic acid, Port Salut cheese, perforated Bermuda onions and Jockey Club perfume. The compound, influenced psychologically by the compound and unable to resist the metaphysical power of its fumes, thereupon betrays his guilt by twitching his left ear.

Garnishing a scientific triumph of this species with a deal of muddled reasoning on allied subjects, the author of the Stage Society's exhibit has given birth to a melodrama that reveals little else than a hand skilled in the externals of play-making. The affair is filled with much opaque both and its rostrum animadversions upon various phases of hypnotism and such like amusements are, to say the least, suspiciously spoonish. For example, the play divulges an instance of long-distance hypnotism that tickles the ribs ever more wholesomely than the you-can't-pull-that-trigger-whimsy of the "Witching Hour." Certainly, this was not meant seriously by the author. Indeed, there are several points in the play that increase the conviction that the composition was intended as an experiment upon the public, an effort to determine for once and all just how much hocus-pocus it would stand.

There is one scene in the piece that contains good melodrama material of the patent kind, this the scene wherein the "Soul Machine" or so-called psychometer, is demonstrated. The flicker of the instrument's light in a darkened room as gradually it betrays the villain's unwilling reaction to certain guilt-fastening words massages the average spine with the proper degree of impressiveness. But the balance of the script is merely waddy. Among the features of the cast, in addition to the long-distance hypnotism coup already alluded to, is the dreaming by a man's sister of the fellow's death at the very moment he has breathed his last, to say nothing of a side trip to the dream in which the psychic baggage whips a vision of the murderer whom (Feat No. 2) she later recognizes on the streets of New York. The brother (Feat No. 3), having been done to death in Milwaukee. Besides these juicy specimens of the imagination, there is a succulent ado over auras, male and female.

One cannot, to repeat, mistake the Thomas touch, or influence. There is in the piece all the empty profundity, the obscure dialectic, the pouter-pigeon learning to which we have grown accustomed in the last word of the keen guided dramatist—a dramatist of so keen a skill in play-building that it is something of a pity he has not contented himself with aiming merely to compose agreeable theatrical pastimes in lieu of these dramas in whose theses he is in the physical, if not the psychical, phases of the production were managed with a sufficient measure of adroitness.

If these Stage Societies desire to accomplish anything for the native theater, however, let them have done with the promulgation of such stuffs as "The Soul Machine" and sit down to the trunks of such neglected and talented writers for the theater as Tom Barry, Zoe Akins and the like. Meeting in front parlors and dabbling with orange ices is one thing. Producing "Soul Machines" is one thing. But helping the American stage is yet another thing. The holiday upon the stage of the Empire is being celebrated, as custom holds, with Barrie's rare weave, "Peter Pan." I have, in the ten years since its initial presentation, written often and much of this eerie and joyful play—but never have I been able so aptly to cast its spirit into type as now my rotund friend, Robert Hobart Davis, kaiser-in-chief of the publications of the House of Munsey, has contrived in the last word of the keen guided dramatist—a dramatist of so keen a skill in play-building that it is something of a pity he has not contented himself with aiming merely to compose agreeable theatrical pastimes in lieu of these dramas in whose theses he is in the physical, if not the psychical, phases of the production were managed with a sufficient measure of adroitness.

Dear Peter Pan: Every year I wait for you to come back to New York. My folks

don't let me go to the theater often. They are trying to bring me up right. They don't understand shows like I do but I intend to see Peter Pan every year, you bet. I wonder if you ever read me sitting in the theater when you were playing Peter Pan? I never take my eyes off you.

Tuesday night I'll be sitting down stairs somewhere with another boy fifty-two years old. I am only 47. Both of us is crazy about you.

In the scene where the Indians appear and you and the whole bunch is down in the cellar, I'm going to give a little war whoop, hopin' you'll hear it. I'll make it very soft and low. Perhaps owing to the cave you can't hear me at all. But later on when you walk up to the pirate and give him that awful call you can hear my heart beat if you listen; then you'll know where I am.

I don't want anybody to know that I'm writing to you Peter because most people can't understand. Listen Peter! I can't go to sleep sometimes after seeing you in the show. My folks who are very old-fashioned, won't let me hang around the stage entrance or I would be there some evening to make you a low respect-bow.

Please remember Peter, play your very best because I told my pa that you were the greatest actor in the world and we expect to have the night of our lives next Tuesday.

Listen Peter! When you fly away on the wind couldn't you fly over me and drop something so I could remember you by it?

My pal says you're busy getting ready for the show. So am I.

Father says when I grow up I won't care so much for the theater but nobody can keep me away as long as you're acting.

My pal asks me to send you his love but I told him he can't do that 'less he seen you act and as I have saw you I send mine instead.

Hopin' you'll fly over as suggested, I am Yours forever.

(Signed) ROBERT H. DAVIS. P. S.—When you hear that heart stop beatin', it's mine and you can start it up again by just one little kind look.

(Signed) BOB DAVIS. P. P. S.—I'll be wearin a black suit of clothes, white shirt, white cravat and patent leather shoes (you can't see 'em) but you can hear 'em. You can't mistake me.

(Signed) BOB. You know! At the Princess Theater, a musical entertainment is derived from Philip Bartholomae's farce "Over Night."

The production is sponsored by the Marbury-Comstock Company and contains a measure of lifting, if already familiar, synopsis, together with some rather Joece gymnastics by John Hazard, a very pretty face by Alice Dorey, some eye-piquing costumes from the hand of Melville Ellis and from the mill of Hickson, several pinchable ladies in and out of the chorus, a sorry Ford feat.

A sport shiri a burlesque scene from Marie Cahill's last season's failure "Ninety in the Shade" a song from Elsie Janis's this season's failure "Miss Information," a pair of black and white checked spats, a number of melodies by Jerome Kern that sound very much like Mr. Jerome Kern's "Some Sort of Girl" which in turn sounded very much like Mr. Jerome Kern's "You're Here and I'm Here," a half dozen naughty mots one of which is funny, and a good bit of clowning by Ernest Truax.

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INFANT PRODIGY SAYS SHE WAS BORN THAT WAY

"Mlle. Sugar Plum," Alias Marilyn Miller, Who Will Be Seen at the Belasco Theater Soon With Winter Garden Show, Has Spent Most of Her Life Eluding Gerry Society.

"Living down the reputation of an infant prodigy," says Marilyn Miller, who will dance at the Belasco Theater for one week beginning January 17, in the Winter Garden revue, "The Passing Show of 1915," "is not an easy matter. For twelve years I was under its spell, but my escape came one year and a half ago when I was able to play for the first time before a metropolitan audience at the New York Winter Garden. Previous to that I was banished to the territory outlying New York and Illinois, because the law would not permit me to appear in either of those States.

"How did I happen to be an infant prodigy? It was the most natural thing in the world. I guess I was born that way. My father and mother and two sisters were all performers, my father, Caro Miller, having been on the stage since he was a boy. He was living in Findlay, Ohio, when the juvenile 'Pin-afore' craze first swept the country from ocean to ocean, and possessing a good voice, he ran away from home and joined one of those organizations, singing the role of Sir Joseph Porter. That, I believe, was the beginning of our career on the stage. By and by, after he had become of age and was then an established performer, he married and when my two sisters came and they grew old enough they were added to the act, which was called 'The Columbian Four.' My sister Ruth was a wonderful soft shoe dancer and was called 'the female George Primrose.' Claire, the other, was also a very clever dancer, but her real forte was the piano.

"When I was born, however, there was never any thought of my going on the stage. My home, by the way, was in Evansville, Ind., and not Findlay, Ohio. As soon as I was old enough I was bundled up and taken along with the act. One day I saw a moving picture of a Russian ballet dancer and I was so impressed with the beauty of this woman that I began imitating her. Of course, I had seen my sisters dance on the stage, but they never seemed to make the same impression.

"They encouraged my efforts and as I perished mother made a crinoline skirt for me and my debut occurred on August 20, 1900, at Lake Side Park, Dayton, Ohio, and even today mother prizes this little dress of mine more dearly than anything she possesses. I was billed as 'Mlle. Sugar Plum,' and it was all on account of me that father and mother and my sisters put in ten years of the wildest traveling. I think any act has been compelled to undergo. You see there were a number of States in which I dare not act and many a time father has had to book towns along the border of a State in order to be able to escape across the line in case the officers attempted to capture me. However, during these years we found work and peace in Canada, Hawaii, the West Indies and in England. As I grew older 'Mlle. Sugar

Plum' was dropped and we were then billed as 'The Five Columbians.'

"About three years ago we went to London to appear in a big revue, but sister Ruth married shortly after we arrived, as did sister Claire. That is how it came about that I danced alone in London and had the good fortune to meet Mr. Lee Shubert.

"So now that I am 16-I feel like a grandmother. I hope no one will call me a prodigy. I'm just a plain little girl who dances because she loves to."

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THEATRICAL BRIEFS.

Fred G. Berger assumes the management of Poli's Theater this week. Mr. Cone, who has been the manager for the last six months, leaves this morning in his automobile for New Haven, Conn. the head office of the Poli organization.

Mary Nash has been engaged by Klaw and Erlanger and George C. Tyler to create the leading role in "The Ohio Lady," the new play by Booth Tarkington and Julian Street.

When Henry W. Savage produced "Along Came Ruth," at the Olympic Theater, Chicago, the title role, which is to be played this week by Florence Rittenhouse, was enacted by Florence Shirley, the attractive little leading woman.

FIRST ANNUAL CONVENTION
WOMAN'S PEACE PARTY
NEW WILLARD HOTEL, Jan. 5 to 11.
MASS MEETING
At Poli's Theater Sunday, Jan. 5, 3 P. M.
SEATS FREE.
Speakers: Miss Jane Addams, Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, and Others.

MME.
MELBA
POLI'S THEATER
Monday Afternoon, January 10, 4:30.
Prices—\$2.00, \$2.50, \$3.00, \$1.50, \$1.00.
Boxes, \$35.00.
New on sale at Droop's, 13th and G.

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